

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 EURE-00 PM-07 NSC-10

SPC-03 SS-20 RSC-01 L-03 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PRS-01

IO-14 ACDA-19 DRC-01 /135 W

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P R 031715Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5030

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

DIA WASHDC

COMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX SEVEN

CINCUSNAVEUR

USCINCEUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 2383

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MT, UK

SUBJ: ISRAELI PATROL CRAFT

REF: VALLETTA 2381 (NOTAL)

1. WHILE DCM WAS OBTAINING INFORMATION REFTEL FROM ISRAELI DCM, UK HIGH COMMISSIONER ASKED AMBASSADORS OF US, FRG, ITALY TO MEET WITH HIM FOR REVIEW OF INCIDENT. WHILE UK HAD KEPT US INFORMED, IT HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY SPOKEN WITH ITALIANS AND GERMANS.

2. FOLLOWING INFORMATION NOT PREVIOUSLY REPORTED CAME OUT: ROYAL NAVY UTILITY AND HMS DEVONSHIRE FIRST SPOTTED TWO UNIDENTIFIED SMALL WARSHIPS PROCEEDING SOUTHWEST
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OF MALTA AND OUTSIDE TERRITORIAL WATERS, AFTERNOON, THURSDAY,

NOVEMBER 29. FRIDAY A.M. HMS DEVONSHIRE SAW TWO ISRAELI CRAFT ANCHORED ON EMILE OFF MALTESE COAST. DEVONSHIRE AT TIME WAS ENGAGED IN UNDERWAY TRAINING.

3. AT 1:30 P.M. FRIDAY, DEC 1, MINTOFF MADE HIS REQUEST TO UK HIGH COMMISSIONER TO BRING VESSELS INTO HARBOUR. WHEN MORETON ASKED IF MINTOFF WAS REQUESTING ROYAL NAVY TO USE FORCE IF NECESSARY, MINTOFF REPLIED YES. MORETON OF COURSE REFERRED REQUEST TO UKG. AT 3:30 P.M. MINTOFF INFORMED MORETON THAT VESSELS WERE UNDERWAY AND DEPARTING AND RENEWED REQUEST THAT THEY BE BROUGHT INTO HARBOUR.

4. MINTOFF ALSO TOLD MORETON HE HAD HEARD ISRAELI VESSELS HAD BEEN MANEUVERING WITH NATO SHIPS AND HAD REFUELED FORM "NAVAL" SOURCES (IMPLYING UK OR NATO).

5. LATE EVENING DEC 1, LONDON TOLD MORETON NAVY OOULD NOT ACT; DENIED ANY REFUELING OF ISRAELI VESSELS FORM UK RESOURCES, AND SAID THEY HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF ANY NATO VESSELS IN THE AREA.

6. MINTOFF TOOK NOTE OF FOREGOING THEN ASSERTED HMS DEVONSHIRE HAS PASSED WITHIN 100 YARDS OF VESSELS EVENING NOV 29 WITHIN MALTESE TERRITORIAL WATERS. MORETON ADMITTED THE ENCOUNTER, BUT SAID IT WAS OUTSIDE TERRITORIAL WATERS.

7. (MORETON TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT UK LATTER EMBARRASSED TO) LEARN THAT GOM HAD PASSED LAW IN DEC 1971 EXTENDING TERRITORIAL WATERS TO SIX MILES, WITH 12 MILES FOR FISHERIES. MORETON HAS DEC 3 WRITTEN TO MINTOFF CORRECTING THIS POINT, BUT CONFIRMING NO UK VESSELS MANEUVERED OF HAD CONTACT WITH ISRAELIS).

8. MORETON HAD JUST RECEIVED MESSAGE FROM UK NATO DEL STATING THAT THEY HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY ITALIAN DELEGATIONWIT REPORT ON INCIDENT, AND SAYING ITALY HAD ALSO BEEN REQUESTED TO INTERVENE. SLIGHTLY EMBARRASSED, ITALIAN AMBASSADOR SAID HE WAS NOT AWARE OF THIS POINT BUT KNEW THAT MINTOFF HAD TELEPHONED DUCCI DIRECTLY
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IN ROME.

9. ITALIAN AMBASSADOR WENT ON TO SAY THAT PRIME MINISTER HAD CALLED HIM IN AFTERNOON OF DEC 1 TO INFORM HIM OF INCIDENT, AND SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO WARN NATO AND "DO SOMETHING" TO ISRAEL. ITALIAN AMBASSADOR NOW INFORMED BY ROME THAT ISRAELI PARTOL CRAFT DO OPERATE IN MID-MEDITERRANEAN, AND THEY BELIEVE CRAFT WERE

REFUELED BY ISRAELI TANKER.

10. MINTOFF POINTED OUT TO ITALIAN AMBASSADOR THAT HE DID NOT HAVE ADEQUATE MEANS TO PATROL HIS OWN WATERS, AND NEEDED HELP. HE SUGGESTED HE MIGHT OBTAIN ASSISTANCE FROM LIBYANS.

11. LAST INFORMATION CONVEYED BY ITALIAN WAS THAT MALTESE CABINET WENT INTO SESSION AT 1 P.M. DEC 3, AND WAS STILL MEETING AS OF 5 P.M. ON THIS SUBJECT.

12. COMMENT: WHILE MINTOFF IS UNDERSTANDABLY CONCERNED AT PRESENCE ISRAELI NAVAL VESSELS IN HIS WATERS, ALMOST ONLY TOOL HE HAS TO STRIKE BACK IS REPTURE OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, WHICH WOULD OBVIOUSLY PLEASE LIBYANS. ON OTHER HAND, SUCH ACT WOULD HAVE REPERCUSSIONS WITHIN SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL, AND POSSIBILITY COMMON MARKET WHICH MINTOFF IS WOOING. AND IT WOULD ALSO UNDERMINE HIS SELF-PROCLAIMED NEUTRAL AND BALANCED POSTURE ON MIDDLE EAST QUESTION.

13. THREAT TO SEEK LIBYAN ASSISTANCE TYPICALLY MADE ITALIANS TOES CURL, BUT WE THINK THIS IS UNLIKELY.

14. PRO GOVERNMENT PRESS HAS PLAYED INCIDENT IN FAIRLY LOW KEY, EMPHASIZING THAT VESSELS WERE SEEKING SHELTER FROM HEAVY WEATHER. IF MINTOFF SHOULD DECIDE LET MATTER DROP, THIS WOULD PROBABLY BE HIS EXCUSE. POSSIBILITY OF BREAKING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE DISMISSED. GETZ

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